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ABSTRACT

The premise that there are no valid and reliable psychological tests for use with Indochinese refugees is discussed. The history of the use of tests in the United States has been promulgated as being beneficial to the minority group members exposed to them without revealing their underlying discriminatory uses. Only the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) meets the assumptions of pluralistic asessment in a non-biased manner. SOMPA has not yet been standardied for other than Black and Hispanic children in the age range of 5-11 years. Psychological tests used for other minority groups are clearly discriminatory and in violation of existing federal regulations. Interim measures for evaluating Indochinese students who are refugees must not be permitted to extend beyond another year as the technology exists for adapting the SOMPA techniques for these students. The moral, ethical, and professional standards relating to psychologists must serve to govern psychologists' involvement in what has been determined to represent discriminatory testing practices for Indochinese student refugees. (Author/GK)

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 3, 1980

Symposium: Psychological Research and Service

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

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Abstract

There are no valid and reliable psychological tests for use with Indochinese refugees. The history of the use of tests in the United States has been promulgated as being beneficial to the minority group members exposed to them without revealing their underlying discriminatory uses. Only SOMPA (System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment), developed by Jane Mercer, meets the assumptions of pluralistic assessment in a non-biased manner. SOMPA has not yet been standardized for other than Black and Hispanic children in the age range 5-11 years. Psychological tests used for other minority groups are clearly discriminatory and in violation of existing federal regulations. Interim measures for evaluating Indochinese students who are refugees must not be permitted to extend beyond another year as the technology exists for adapting the SOMPA techniques for these students. The moral, ethical, and professional standards relating to psychologists must serve to govern psychologists' involvement in what has been determined to represent discriminatory testing practices for Indochinese student refugees.

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The assessment of children represents a complex process involving dynamic interactions between the psychologist and the student referred for evaluation. The interpersonal variables are of critical importance to the validity of the information obtained. It is of utmost importance to focus on the basic premise that the purpose of any assessment is to help the individual involved. If this condition cannot be met for any reason, the ethical standards of the evaluator is open to serious question as well as the results of the evaluation. The implications of the interpersonal dynamic are of such significance that they cannot be overlooked. The interested party may wish to review one of the most sensitive and critical appraisals of this process which is reported by Roy Schafer in his classic text. He states:

> The clinical testing situation has a complex psychological structure. It is not an impersonal getting together of two people in order that one, with the help of a little rapport, may obtain some objective test responses from the other...an intricate interpersonal relationship, with realistic and unrealistic aspects exists during the testing...

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[1] Roy Schafer, Psychoanalytic Interpretation in Rorchach Testing. (Grune and Stratton, New York, 1954), Chapter 2 "Interpersonal Dynamics in the Test Situation", p. 6

Acknowledging these factors in the assessment of culturally similar persons only serves to highlight the difficulties inherent in evaluating persons from other cultures. Leon Kamin reports in his book:

> The I.Q. test in America, and the way in which we think about it, has been fostered by men committed to a particular social view. That view includes the belief that those on the bottom are genetically inferior victims of their own immutable defects. The consequence has been that the I.Q. test has served as an instrument of oppression against the poor--dressed in the trappings of science, rather than politics...the poor, the foreign-born, and racial minorities were shown to be stupid...[2]

Jane Mercer, an outstanding sociologist, whose contributions to the theory and practice of assessment of minority groups has been a landmark in the history of multicultural pluralistic assessment of school-age children. Her work should be mandatory reading for all psychologists involved in the psychological evaluation processes. With regard to SOMPA (System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment), Mercer states:

> Every system of educational assessment is based on certain assumptions about the nature of society. These assumptions are seldom expressed explicitly and may not be clearly understood even by those who are using a particular assessment system. (p. 13)
>
> Every test or battery of measures is guided by some theory about the nature of society, a particular world view or Weltanschauung. In most cases, the underlying world view is implicit in the procedures that are used in developing and administering the measures. Neither the designer nor the user of the measures may be fully aware of the latent functions and value implications of their procedures. (p. 14)
>
> The Anglo-conformity conception of American Society forms the foundation for current testing practices in public education in American society. The implicit premise of standardized tests administered in the United States is that "Americanization" has taken place and the children and grandchildren of earlier immigrants have been Anglicized...Present assessment procedures make no allowance for children being reared in families which are neither structurally nor culturally integrated into the core culture...In making inferences about children's intelligence or aptitudes, present procedures presume that America is a culturally homogeneous society in which all children are being socialized into essentially the same Anglo-American cultural tradition. (p. 19)[3]

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[2] Leon Kamin, The Science and Politics of I.Q. (John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1974), pp. 1-2.

[3] Jane R. Mercer, System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment: Technical Manual. (The Psychological Corporation, New York, 1979), pp. 13-19.

Enlightened psychologists should be aware that all testing is biased and that, although some tests are less biased than others, the consequences of the introduced biases may be detrimental to the best interests of the students unless SOMPA-like approaches can be developed for other than the Black and Hispanic students for whom the SOMPA has been validated. Until this occurs, serious consideration must be given to the severe limitations characteristic of the interim processes now being used to evaluate refugee children. It is necessary to note that the testing procedures now being employed by educational systems and other community agencies are to be considered gross estimates of the developmental status of school-age children rather than valid and reliable measures of intelligence, achievement, and emotional status. This caveat is not intended to convey an attitude of doom and helplessness for the professionals confronted with the legitimate need to make decisions about children in educational settings. It is intended to communicate the primitive state of our development of procedures guaranteed to assist children in need of appropriate educational programs in the absence of alternatives for other than Black and Hispanic students between the ages of 5-11 years for whom the SOMPA remains the only ethical evaluative response given the available body of research at this time in our lives.

With full consideration to the reality factors involved in assessing any child not indigenous to the Anglo culture, special concern needs to be directed to those students whose native cultural heritage is specific to the cultural groupings commonly referred to as Indochinese. Currently, 14,000 of approximately 25,000 Indochinese being resettled each month will be relocated in the United States.[4] Arriving Indochinese are certified as political refugees, and declared exempt from immigration restrictions, and admitted under a special authority granted by the U.S. Attorney General.[5]

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[4]P. Hartling, Interviewed by C. Dickey in the Washington Post, June 14, 1980, p. A-14.

[5]Babcock, 1980: U.S. Department of State.

The consequence of being a refugee uprooted from a familiar culture to a new and different one impose tremendous emotional, social, economic, and cultural hardships on the individual and the family constellation. The problems of the Indochinese refugees have been compounded by the rapid exodus under the most trying of conditions. The Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians have fled from the three Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and have numbered more than one million. There has been no other major group of people classified as refugees in recent years who have been subjected to the psychological and physical terrors of the Indochinese who were set adrift to starve or drown or to just lie down and die. The welcoming of these refugees into the United States represents only the first phase of a magnificent effort to assist them in relocating to a democratic way of life.

While the Indochinese refugees have shared a common and large geographic area of the globe, the languages, cultural patterns, religions and histories are diverse. It would appear that the use of the adjective Indochinese is a clear misnomer with little in the name to identify the richness and diversity of the cultural groups comprising the term. It is essential that any psychologist not familiar with either the Vietnamese, Cambodian or Laotian cultures resist from generalizing that there is a common denominator. If there is one--it is exclusively that they are all refugees. It should be recognized that there is a cultural reluctance among refugees to seek help. Many of the problems to be reported will, no doubt, relate to the stresses of uprooting and the impact of cultural adjustment. It can be expected that the Indochinese refugees, with the exception of blatant health problems, will be very reluctant to admit to the existence of any mental health problems. This reluctance will be tied into a general concern that they may be viewed as a problem to the community-at-large and run the risk of being viewed as undesirables. The majority of the refugees will have had no prior experience

with either mental health constructs or practices. Depression can be expected to represent the most frequent mental health problem to be encountered. Additionally, educational placement problems and peer pressures for quick acculturation have also been found to induce stress in school-age children while many students will feel strongly isolated by language and cultural differences. It is also to be noted that religion may constitute a source of solace for the Laotians and Cambodians more so than for the Vietnamese. Buddhism is an integral part of the Cambodian life style with religion playing an important, but lesser role for the Vietnamese and Laotians. Health problems will be present in large numbers of refugees owing to the extreme deprivation experienced.

The major problems associates with the provision of psychological evaluations to Indochinese refugees relates to: (A) providing assessment for students suspected of being handicapped according to the provisions of P.L. 94-142.[6] The Federal Regulations clearly state, under Protection in Evaluation Procedures, Section 121a.530(b), "Testing and evaluation materials and procedures used for the purposes of evaluation and placement of handicapped children must be selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally disciminatory." Additionally, Section 121a.532, Evaluation procedures, addresses the minimum mandatory requirements for evaluation of either handicapped students or children suspected of having handicapping conditions for whom an initial assessment is to be undertaken by the local education agency.

> (1) Are provided and administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so;
>
> (2) Have been validated for the specific purpose for which they are used; and

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[6] U.S. Congress, Education of the Handicapped Children (P.L. 94-142), Department of HEW Office of Education, Federal Register, Vol. 42, No. 163, Tuesday, August 23, 1977.

(3) Are administered by trained personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by their producer;

(b) Tests and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those which are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient;

(c) Tested are selected and administered so as best to ensure that when a test is administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the test results accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the child's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (except where those skills are the factors which the test purports to measure);

(d) No single procedure is used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child; and

(e) The evaluation is made by a multidisciplinary team or group of persons, including at least one teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability.

(f) The child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, where appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

It is to be noted that although P.L. 94-142 is exclusively for handicapped students, the same criteria appear to govern the evaluation of students who are refugees from other countries where English is not the primary language. This position has been strongly espoused in State Department of Education Protection in Evaluation regulations promulgated to insure that students who do not speak English as a primary language are protected. The American Psychological Association, Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests, points out that the evaluator needs to carefully look for the influences of "racial and cultural factors" which might influence performance.[7]

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[7] American Psychological Association, Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests, Washington, D.C., 1974.

(B) It is necessary to continuously keep in mind that the welfare of the student must be the primary goal of the assessor. The principles by which the psychologist is guided must include ethical and legal considerations which include obtaining informed consent, protecting the privacy of self-disclosures of clients, and maintaining confidentiality of written reports. Testing of students from different cultural, social, or ethnic backgrounds or students for whom English is not the native language must be conducted with special sensitivity to their status as it relates to psychological testing and establishing rapport and confidence in the purposes of the specified intervention.

(C) The psychological evaluation of students must be regulated by standards. The American Psychological Association, Standards for Providers of Psychological Services[8] requires that "Whenever a Psychology Service exists, a qualified psychologist shall be responsible for planning, directing, and reviewing the provision of psychological services". The qualifications of individuals presenting themselves as psychologists must meet the requirements established by the State Educational Agency or the Professional Board of Examiners which governs the certification of licensing of psychologists in the state where the psychologist is employed.

(D) Because valid and reliable psychological test instruments have not been standardized on Indochinese refugees one wonders how to present a discussion of the "Psychological Assessment of Indochinese Refugees". To those who raise that question at this point I can only state that I feel confident that you are getting the point I am addressing!

However, there are administrative realities which must be taken into account. How do you respond to the educational-developmental needs of students who are experiencing problems in the school or community setting which must be acted upon?

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[8] American Psychological Association, Standards for Providers of Psychological Services, Washington, D.C., 1974.

The answer is apparent--psychological testing is conducted exclusively for the benefit of the student to assist in assessing intellectual-emotional factors associated with either the teaching, learning, or adjustment processes influencing the student in the school or community setting. In all instances, the guiding principle will be the best interests of the student in relationship to the severity of the problem. Informed consent shall bring to the attention of the parents, guardians or student of age the serious constraints involved in the use of psychological tests and procedures which have not been standardized for the purpose(s) intended. Interim procedures must be created with the clear understanding from the appropriate administrative source that SOMPA procedures will be implemented following a commitment from the highest administrative authority that efforts will be made to standardize SOMPA for the appropriate age and cultural groups involved. The technology already exists for the design of use of SOMPA for other cultural groupings than the original ones used in the SOMPA standardization.

The interim measures advocated refer to the use of the usual battery of instruments which are age and use appropriate for the host culture on which they were standardized. There should be an observation of the student in the educational setting; intensive interviews with parent(s), guardian(s) or persons with knowledge and interest in the student and the use at all times of a skilled interpreter familiar with the language, culture and other facets of the student's background and experiences. Although referrals will continue to be made, the only honest response is that there are no valid and reliable psychological tests standardized on Indochinese students available today. Any educational source evaluating students pursuant to the existing Federal regulations is in violation of the law. The psychologist must be guided by the ethical, moral and professional

standards applicable in each situation. The current procedures are to be used only as interim measures with the full informed consent of the parties to the evaluation. Interim measures for evaluating Indochinese students must not be permitted to extend beyond another year as the technology exists for adopting SOMPA techniques for these students. The moral, ethical and professional standards relating to psychologists must serve as governing psychologists involvement in what has been determined to represent discriminatory testing practices for Indochinese student refugees.